

Charlotta Gustafsson

Crime Prevention in Sweden

Sweden in brief

Sweden is a small country with about nine million inhabitants. The Swedish Police Service consists of the Swedish National Police Board and 21 police authorities, each responsible for policing one of the counties in the country. In 2013, the Swedish Parliament decided to reorganize the Swedish Police Service. The 21 county police authorities are to be replaced by one national police force. The new national police authority will be implemented on January 1st 2015.

Locally, Sweden is administrated by 290 municipalities and organized into 21 counties. The municipalities are elected in separate municipal elections. Municipalities are responsible for social services, schools, emergency services, the physical environment *etc.* Crime prevention, however, is optional.

The Swedish municipalities enjoy a great deal of autonomy. State authorities govern them by:

- enacting laws and supervising their implementation,
- offering financial support for certain measures,
- offering methodological support.

The National Council for Crime Prevention: Brå

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (*Brottsförebyggande rådet* – Brå) – an agency under the Ministry of Justice – is a center for research and development within the judicial system.

The Council primarily works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime and crime prevention activities. The Council also produces Sweden's official crime statistics, the Swedish Crime survey, evaluates reforms, conducts research to develop new knowledge and provides support to local crime prevention.

The Unit for Local Crime Prevention (now called the Unit for the development of Crime Prevention) was formed in 1998 and has since been developing

and spreading knowledge on local crime prevention through handbooks, conferences, seminars and a website (www.bra.se/forebyggabrott). The unit also distributes small financial support. In the early 2000s, it was mainly start-up support for local councils, but over the years, the support has increasingly gone to evaluating local measures. These small-scale evaluations can be then used and shared with others. The unit also arranges an annual national conference for crime preventive stakeholders with networking meetings and workshops.

There have been shifts in the emphasis of the support. Initially, the building of local structures (i.e. local councils for crime prevention) were prominent and local stakeholders were encouraged to map problems and follow-ups. In the 1990s, national support highlighted methods as to what worked and what was promising. Today, the National Council for Crime Prevention stresses the process of crime prevention and increased inter-authority cooperation.

Agreements on collaboration in crime prevention

The key premise behind crime preventive in Sweden is the importance of good knowledge about local problems and conditions. Crime occurs locally and therefore the solutions have to be local. A key to success is collaboration and in Sweden this mainly consists of cooperation between the police and the municipalities.

In 2008, the Swedish National Police Board commissioned all regional police to sign cooperation agreements at the top level with municipalities. The agreements are not legally binding, but they still have a significant impact on local work. Equally important is to follow a work process for collaboration to insure sustainable cooperation over time. A major aspect of this process is that the work emanates from a jointly made description of the problems. Local problems motivate collaboration and set the frame for interventions despite different goals and organizational types.

Structured Crime Prevention includes five steps:

- 1) initiating collaboration,
- 2) mapping the local problem,
- 3) analyzing the causes of the problem (why) and choosing appropriate measures
- 4) implementation,
- 5) following up/evaluation.

Despite not being mandatory, about 85% of the 290 municipalities in Sweden have now a signed cooperation with the police. Main focuses of these agreements are youth at risk, delinquency and alcohol. There is an increasing interest for more targeted prevention, for example a focus on hot spots or persons specially active or vulnerable. Safety is also a major concern, but mostly from the perspective of reducing the fear of crime. In about 10% of the agreements, the aim is to prevent organized crime and in a few recidivism.

The agreement is implemented by local councils for crime prevention. The local councils are often run by the municipalities, but the police are an equally important member.

Our common responsibility: National crime prevention strategy

The ongoing development and improvement of local crime prevention has been taking place for almost twenty years. In the 1990s, the Swedish police underwent a community policing reform with the goal to implement problem-oriented policing. The aim was to do more preventive work closely with the community and to do more knowledge-based work. Before that time, crime prevention for the police was mainly centered on special projects conducted by a few officers. The Community Policing reform (*närpolisreformen*) implied a major decentralization of the police force. The reason for the reform was to facilitate the introduction of problem-oriented policing. The definition of crime prevention in the reform widened.

About seven years ago, the police began to implement the model of intelligence-led policing. During this time, police were criticized by the state, that the definition of crime prevention was too wide: nearly all police work can be viewed as preventing crime. A new workable definition of what “crime prevention” is, in the police context, is now being evaluated by the police.

At the same time as the community policing reform in the 1990s, the government presented a national crime prevention strategy called *Our Collective Responsibility*. It is still the most recent and current comprehensive strategy on crime prevention in Sweden. Separate strategies have been published since, e.g. on alcohol and drug prevention, on preventing men’s violence against women, strategies against organized crime *etc.*

The national strategy on crime prevention called for the formation of Local Councils for Crime Prevention. They are intended to be a platform of cooperation between different local stakeholders on a grassroots level. Local councils have a local coordinator and the councils consist mostly of police, social services and schools. In the middle of the 2000s, the formation of local councils reached its peak and leveled off. In 2009, 88% of municipalities and city districts had a council for crime prevention.

The Local Councils for Crime Prevention commonly focus on:

- alcohol and drug prevention,
- youth at risk,
- crime prevention in schools,
- safety and security (camera surveillance, outdoor lighting, neighborhood watch and/or neighborhood safety walks/security surveys).

Future challenges

A recent study on the cooperation agreements conducted by the National Council for Crime Prevention shows that the agreements are perceived to have produced several improvements, for example in the relations between the police and the municipalities and how collaboration is organized. The agreements also seem to affect the structure, quality, long-term perspective and effects of crime prevention work. However, the evaluation also illustrates the need for some improvement.

Nearly half of the cooperation agreements lack an analysis of the causes of the local crime problems and thereby a basis for how the measures are intended to affect criminality. For example: Are the crime problems caused by factors in the physical environment or problems at the individual level? An important future challenge, therefore, is to develop the local stakeholders' ability to analyze their local problems.

Local crime prevention in Sweden has been and still is mainly focused on youth and alcohol related crimes. The most common type of measure is information, for example information about alcohol and drugs to students or parents. These are measures that have been conducted even before the strategy *Our Collective Responsibility* (1998) and the cooperation agreements (2008). A future challenge will be how to open and broaden the field of crime prevention measures and demonstrate what kind of crime problems can be prevented in cooperation with the local level, such as organized crime and domestic violence.

In the evaluation of the cooperation agreements a lack of resources is the most common theme in response to open questions about what difficulties respondents meet in implementation of crime prevention measures. It is suggested that the types of prevention that are included in the agreements is not valued sufficiently higher up in the chain of command. A future challenge will be to professionalize the tasks of structuring the knowledge based crime preventive work and make decision makers aware of the gains of doing a thorough local mapping and analysis, widening the scope of measures and locate enough resources to that task.

Example: Local cooperation to prevent civil disorder

Rinkeby is a district of the city of Stockholm with a comparatively high degree of socio-economic problems. The year 2004 was a challenging time in Rinkeby with several instances of civil disorder where youth set fire to cars, threw rocks at police and the fire department etc. Despite these challenges, local crime prevention in Rinkeby has been a role model since the 1990's. The school in Rinkeby won the EU European Crime Prevention Awards in 1998 for their preventive work with the youth.

The local council for crime prevention in Rinkeby was set up around the turn of the century, financed by special state money for development in city districts

with high unemployment. In the early 2000's, the local council decided to focus its crime prevention work strategically. The local coordinator stated in 2003:

In Rinkeby, the local council for crime prevention is focused mainly on situational prevention, because this type of work more often gives a visible and measurable result. Many local councils start their work doing social prevention. This gives mainly long-term results and it's hard to prove its effectiveness. [Brå 2003, p. 19]

The local council for crime prevention in Rinkeby has evolved into a broad network. The focus of crime prevention measures is still, as was in 2003, on situational prevention. This work is based on a close dialogue with local community representatives: mosques, youth organizations, landlords, housing associations, women's shelters and local businesses. Social work is done mostly by social services in cooperation with other stakeholders and focuses mainly on drug prevention, social inclusion measures for youth at risk of being recruited into criminal groups and measures against men's violence against women in intimate relationships and the family, including honor-related violence.

The local council for crime prevention form the basic conditions to tackle outbursts of civil disorder. In the year 2011, the Police initiated a project to predict social unrest early by working in cooperation with the local authorities, social services and the local community. As a result of the project, the Police's *Methodological manual for cooperation to counteract social unrest* was published two years later.

Broad and early cooperation between police, social services, schools and the community is a central theme. The manual's point of departure is the principles of community policing: befriending and listening to the local community as a part of crime prevention intelligence. The manual guides the reader to what should be the focus in four different modes, the green (normal), the yellow (elevated risk), the red (violence occurs) and the orange (time after).

In 2013, civil disorder erupted in many of Stockholm's districts. In Rinkeby, however, the situation was relatively calm, suggesting that the strategic development of the local collaboration made it possible to quickly mobilize preventive actions. The local stakeholders were present during the nights and created a positive spirit that presumably prevented social unrest from starting.